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ABSTRACT

Pupils in middle schools should have ample opportunities to write with the use of word processors. Legible writing in longhand will always be necessary in selected situations but, nevertheless, much drudgery is taken care of when using a word processor. Word processors tend to be very user friendly in that few mechanical skills are needed by the writer. Below are a few situations in which word processors were used in ongoing lessons and units of study. First, word processors were used to help students in the group writing of triplets, couplets, and limericks. Second, in a unit on the Middle East, students viewed a set of slides on the Middle East. Then student groups were asked to write a limerick using the word processor. Students seemed to enjoy writing together on the computer. Third, poetry writing was further emphasized by a teaching team in the science curriculum. Pupils were studying a science unit on "The Changing Surface of the Earth." For one learning activity, pupils with their teacher's guidance made a model volcano from plaster of Paris. Ammonium dichromate crystals were lit inside the volcano and liquid materials flowed down its sides. In their groups, pupils were then given a chance to come up with imagery to describe the eruption and to write poetry pertaining to it. (Contains excerpts of student poetry.) (TB)

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MIDDLE SCHOOL PUPIL WRITING AND THE WORD PROCESSOR

Pupils in middle schools should have ample opportunities to write with the use of word processors. Legible writing in longhand will always be necessary in selected situations; a person may not have access to a word processor and thus needs to communicate in manuscript or cursive writing. Otherwise, middle school pupils in each curriculum area should write using the word processor. Much drudgery has been taken care of when using a word processor. Thus a pupil can type in commands to express ideas without initial writing in longhand. To be sure keyboarding skills need to be mastered sequentially. One can make many errors and still achieve well when using the word processor. The spelling of words by the writer needs to be close enough to the correct spelling. The spell check program may be used to have a perfect final copy in terms of correctly spelled words using the word processor. Spell check does not correct if a word is spelled correctly and the wrong homonym has been typed. Any word typed correctly in spelling and is not the word desired needs a good proof reader. The proof reader might then change the wrong correctly spelled word to one that is desired in context.

The return sweep is taken care of automatically by the word processor so that the next line is even in the margin with the preceding line. If a correct paragraph has not been typed in to the word processor, the writer may use the tab key with the press of a finger and have a correct indentation. Any error made such as having a lack of quotation marks can be taken care of quickly by inserting these marks without taking much time for making corrections.

Word processors tend to be very user friendly in that few mechanical skills are needed by the writer. Thus the writer can focus on content written. Since much of the routine drudgery has been taken out of the typing facets, the learner may enjoy and appreciate writing using the word processor.

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Goals in Writing

I have supervised many student teachers and cooperating teachers in middle schools during a thirty year period of time. In Northeast Missouri schools and surrounding areas, word processors on the middle school level are still not adequate in number. A major goal of each school system should be to have enough word processors for middle school pupils so that each has access to do his/ her typing in the language arts as well as all curriculum areas that need written work completed. I have noticed middle school pupils who composed content voluntarily in their spare time with the use of a word processor in school and at home. Pupils bring these finished products to school to show to the teacher and to share with other pupils.

I would like to describe a few situations in which word processors were used in ongoing lessons and units of study.

Situation #1. The student and the regular teacher, as a team, taught a unit on "Writing Poetry." Middle school pupils were to write a limerick. The teachers reviewed with pupils what a triplet and a couplet are in poetry writing. Pupils studied couplets and triplets in a social studies/ language arts integrated curriculum five weeks previously. The teaching team asked pupils to define a triplet. Learners responded with a triplet has three lines with all ending words rhyming. They were asked to give a triplet which was then typed into the computer. Pupils responded rather quickly with the following lines:

Poetry writing is fun
When you enjoy writing a pun
As one is eating a bun.

A sixty point printout of the above named poem was placed on the bulletin board for all to see. Learners were asked to provide a title for the triplet. After a brief discussion, the following title was agreed upon: Poems, Puns, and Fun.

Next, the teaching team asked pupils for a definition of a couplet. Pupils in a committee then wrote a couplet using the word processor.

Three pupils in a committee worked together. Two of these couplets were the following:

I walk in the rain
And I do not feel any pain.

A second couplet given by three pupils working collaboratively on the word processor was the following:

It is very quiet in the room
I do not hear a boom.

Middle school pupils read a definition of a limerick. Several pupils came up with the idea that a limerick contains a triplet and a couplet. The student teacher read two limericks to pupils. These were printed and shown on the bulletin board. By using this procedure, the student teacher further clarified with pupils what a limerick is.

Pupils in the same committees of three members asked if they could write a limerick. The teaching team passed pictures to pupils for observation. Each committee decided if they wanted to use one of these illustrations to write a limerick. Pupils could also choose other content to write about. I will list two limericks written collaboratively by three learners in each committee.

Flowers
I see flowers all around and near me
They are beautiful, but I see no bee
The colors and aroma smell sweet
I hasten to add with no loud downbeat
I wish that I were living close to the sea.

The above limerick does not follow the pattern of beginning with the words, "There once was — ." However it does follow the pattern of lines one, two, and five rhyming; lines three and four also rhyme.

A second committee composed the following limerick:

There once were pupils in a class
Who studied long without a pass
    Pupils in class are busy and quiet
    They show their talent and great might
Those pupils who wish to catch bass.

From the printout, these limericks were posted on the bulletin board. Several volunteered to read orally limericks that had been written in committees.

The teaching team had several anthologies of literature containing limericks for pupils to read. Each team of pupils chose one limerick to read orally to the entire class.

Writing Poetry Across the Curriculum

The student teacher and the cooperating teacher taught a social studies unit on "The Middle East" to these same pupils. After viewing a set of slides presented by the writer who has lived and taught in the Middle East for two years, pupils were encouraged to write a limerick using the word processor. Learners volunteered to work on a different committee of three members to plan and type the limerick. Pupils seem to enjoy writing more than formerly, I believe, due in part to using a word processor. Pupils could choose to develop a limerick based on the presented slides or other information acquired from reading and nonreading materials. All but one committee wrote content pertaining to the slides. I will list two limericks.

Bedouin

There once were bedouins in a tent
Who raised sheep, goats, and camels in a dent
    The desert was hot and dry
    There was no rain in summer from the sky
These nomads had to pay no rent.

The second committee planned and completed the following limerick on the Middle East:

Village Life

The villagers raised many a good farm crop
With olives, figs, and dates, they came out on top
I need to add grapes, melons, and wheat
These are raised and grown in spite of the heat
The crops are wonderful and anything but a flop!

Pupils in committees like to work collaboratively and share their poems with others in the classroom. The printouts of the limericks are placed on hallway walls and share with pupils from different classrooms. With word processors, pupils feel that revising and editing is rather enjoyable. The rewards are to see their own products of poetry displayed for others to see. On the printout displays, a few committees have drawn illustrations that relate to the contents in the poem. The student teacher mentioned to the class that later on graphing would be emphasized in using the computer to develop designs and pictures pertaining to content written for a poem or other form of written work. This created much enthusiasm and interest on the pupil's part.

Poetry writing across the curriculum was further emphasized by the teaching team in the science curriculum. Pupils were studying a science unit on "The Changing Surface of the Earth." As one learning activity, pupils with teacher guidance were making a model volcano from plaster of paris. Pupils used tempera paint to decorate the outside of the model to look as lifelike as possible. Ammonioum dichcromate crystals were lit by the teacher inside the model volcano. The liquidlike materials flowed on the sides of the model to the base of the volcano. Pupils were fascinated at the results. They were asked by the teaching team to describe what was observed. Here, pupils were introduced to imagery in poetry writing. The student teacher described and used examples of what imagery is. Pupils were soon fascinated by making creative comparisons of what had been observed from the "volcanic eruption" of

the volcano. One comparison using imagery was the following: The volcano looked as if colored rain was coming down its sides. Since the writing of limericks was being studied, pupils wanted to put the use of imagery writing in poetry form. Three pupils again on each committee wrote a limerick containing imagery. Pupils took turns doing the typing into the word processor. I will list two limericks written by a committee containing imagery.

The Volcano in Color
There once was a volcano with color
Which spewed fire in high valor
The night was very bright
Oh, what a wonderful sight
It looked very colorful in a burner.

Volcanic Fire
The volcano looked like a swirling mass
With the sides burning brightly as in a quick pass
The site was gorgeous and ferocious
Like a tiger snarling and looking pious.
I wish you were here to see it, lass.

The second limerick did not start with the words, "There once was..." There, however, needs to be selected criteria which indicate a limerick has been written such as lines one, two, and five rhyme as well as lines three and four rhyme.

in Summary

Pupils need to do much more writing when composing with the use of a word processor. Cooperative learning in which pupils work in committees assists in adding enjoyment to the writing activity. Pupils are able to work together effectively when composing poetry and taking turns using the word processor.

Learners also like to see their work displayed from printouts using the word processor. These printouts are placed on the bulletin board, hallways, on classroom walls to show parents and other pupils what is being stressed and what is being learned. At parent/ teacher conferences and school open house, parents have numerous opportunities to notice which objectives teachers are stressing in the classroom. Printouts are saved and bound for future study by pupils. Writing does become increasingly enjoyable as the word processor is used in language arts as it relates to all curriculum areas.